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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000853

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [GE](#) [EZ](#)
SUBJECT: CZECH OPPOSITION LEADER ON MISSILE DEFENSE:
WORRIED ABOUT EUROPEAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATS

Classified By: Acting DCM Michael Dodman for reasons 1.4 b+d

¶1. (C) Summary: Jiri Paroubek, Chairman of the opposition Czech Social Democrats (CSSD), told Ambassador July 18 that he continues to have no personal objection to missile defense, but has been placed in a bind because of the lack of support within his party and the absence of maneuvering room the government has permitted him. He said the best hope for a change in the atmosphere within CSSD would be proof that the missile threat was real, which he does not expect will be seen in the next year. Paroubek said he is very focused on improving CSSD's relations with the German Social Democrats, and said that he is close to reaching an agreement on cooperation with SPD; he made clear that SPD's views on MD will color his own. However, contradicting a statement he made in a televised debate, Paroubek said that he would adhere to any agreement concluded by this government if he becomes Prime Minister, including missile defense. Paroubek also said he looks forward to visiting the United States later this year. End summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador asked to meet with Paroubek to discuss several recent comments the CSSD leader has made that appear to signal a toughening position on MD. The meeting took place at the embassy. The Ambassador acknowledged Paroubek's difficult political situation, but reminded him of his repeated pledge to remain flexible on MD. He encouraged Paroubek to think beyond politics and consider what is important for his country. He reminded Paroubek that CSSD had previously focused heavily on the importance of linking the proposed U.S. MD assets in Europe to NATO, and noted how much progress had been achieved on this front in a short period.

¶3. (C) Paroubek's response was largely focused on politics. He complained that he faced a dilemma in that there was almost no support for MD within his party and further that the Topolanek government had left him "no room to maneuver." He assured the Ambassador he was looking for a way to make MD work within CSSD. The only sure way to build support within the party was to demonstrate that there is an actual threat to the country from missile attack, not a "virtual threat." He doubted such a shift in perception would take place in the next 6-12 months, i.e., within the period that the MD agreements will be negotiated and considered in Parliament. Paroubek acknowledged the Ambassador's assessment of the progress on NATO, but stated only that he "wished it had come earlier."

¶4. (C) Paroubek focused much of the meeting on his relations with other European social democratic parties. He said that CSSD positions will increasingly reflect the views of European social democrats. Specifically he focused on CSSD's links with the German SPD. He termed this the most important partner for CSSD, and said he wants the closest possible cooperation with them. Paroubek revealed that he is now

negotiating a cooperation agreement with SPD. He termed MD the first issue on which SPD had expressed significant interest in cooperating with CSSD. He added that the position of his "friends" in Europe -- mentioning specifically Slovak PM Fico and Italian PM Prodi -- made it difficult for him to take a more positive stance on MD. At the same time, as he always does, Paroubek went out of his way to stress that MD was the only significant issue on which his party disagreed with the U.S.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador and Paroubek also discussed the trip he plans to make (with USG support) to the U.S. in the fall. Paroubek promised to let us know the best dates for travel in October or November, depending on the parliamentary calendar. He said (without notable enthusiasm) that he looks forward to learning more about MD and U.S. policy, and said he had no specific requests in terms of facilities that he would visit.

¶6. (C) Comment: Paroubek clearly feels backed into a corner on MD. It is not clear from this meeting whether he is responding now primarily to domestic political calculations or some desire to boost his influence by expanding his position on the European stage. Czech government officials told us they had not previously heard of Paroubek's desire for closer cooperation with SPD, and plan to use their own connections in Berlin to see if the SPD connection can actually be a positive. The GOCR continues to see Paroubek as a key element in their effort to win eventual parliamentary approval of the MD agreements. We will be encouraging the government to find some way to counter Paroubek's perception that the government has left him no "maneuvering room." We (and the GOCR) continue to support the planned Paroubek trip to the U.S. in the fall, including a visit to U.S. facilities

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where he can be briefed both on the MD system and the threat to Europe and the United States.
DODMAN